



# Imprimatur,

Nov. 15.  
1687.

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(The True Mother  
Church.)*

*Jo. Battely.*





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The TRUE

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# Mother Church,

Or, a Short

Practical Discourse

upon *ACTS II.*

Concerning the

FIRST CHURCH

A T

JERUSALEM.

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*L O N D O N,*

Printed for *Brabazon Aylmer*, at the *Three Pigeons*, against the *Royal Exchange*  
in *Cornhill*. 1688.

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T H E  
 True Mother Church,  
 Or, a Short  
 PRACTICAL DISCOURSE  
 U P O N  
 A C T S II. &c.

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*Acts 2. 41, 42. Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

**I**N this Chapter we have an account how the first Christian Church was gathered. The former part of the Chapter is spent in relating to us the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost, which filled the Apostles, and enabled them to speak with other Tongues:

## 2      *The True Mother Church.*

And the first use which the Apostles made of these Languages, wherewith they were so strangely endued, was to publish the Gospel: that mixt multitude, which consisted of a confluence of Strangers from all Parts, did every man hear them speak in their own Native Language *the wonderfull works of God.* And upon this occasion St. Peter made such an effectual Discourse, proving that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, and exhorting them *to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus*, that it won three thousand Souls to the Christian Religion. This great Body of men added to the Disciples made the first Church at *Jerusalem.* And accordingly the first mention of a Church actually in being, is after the account given of these new Converts, in the last verse of this Chapter: *And the Lord added daily to the Church such as should be saved.*

In the words I have chosen we have these two things.

I. We have an account how these men came to be Christians, and the means of their Conversion: *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.*

II. We have an account of their Religious Assemblies, and the way of Worship used in this First and most Primitive Church: *And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

I. First,

I. First, How these men came to be Christians, and the means of their Conversion: *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.* They were wrought upon by St. Peter's Sermon, they were convinced by his Discourse that Jesus whom they had crucified was the *Messias*: and therefore, according to St. Peter's direction, they resolve to oppose him no longer, but to cast themselves down at his feet, and to own him for their Lord and Master, by undertaking the Profession of his Religion. Now if we observe the Heads of St. Peter's Discourse whereby he thus convinced them, we shall find that he brings his Arguments, either from the Miracles which our Saviour wrought, which are a proof to all Mankind, or from the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which were an acknowledged Principle among the Jews.

i. The Miracles which our Saviour wrought, which were so many Divine Testimonies to the Truth of what he delivered. Every true Miracle is a Testimonial from Heaven, it is God's Seal to warrant our belief in that Person, who is furnisht with such an extraordinary power. It is an assurance to the minds of men that a Person is sent by God, when he does those things *which never man did*, (as the People said of our Saviour,) and God does plainly own and approve that Doctrine which such a one delivers, because

he employs his own Almighty Power to gain credit and belief to that Person.

By a *Miracle*, I mean whatsoever is above or contrary to the course of Nature, and exceeds the power of it: For that must needs be done by a Superiour Power, and cannot be attributed to any other than the God of Nature. Now to say, *That we cannot know a Miracle when we see it, because we cannot tell how far the power of Nature reaches, how far natural Causes can act and no farther*, is a very poor and weak Objection. For though we cannot assign the just bounds and limits of natural Causes, how far they can act, and no farther; though we cannot just describe the Sphere of their activity, and draw a line about it; yet we can tell what is out of the Sphere of their activity, and clearly see when an Effect does far surpass the virtue and efficacy of the natural Cause. As for instance, I know not how far the power of natural Causes may go to fetch a man, who in all appearance is dead, to life again: There may be rare Spirits and *Elixirs* of greater virtue than I know of in this kind. But I know that *Talitha kumi*, the words that our Saviour used to the dead Maid, are none of those Preparations and Restoratives we speak of. I see there is no proportion at all betwixt the Means and the End, betwixt the Cause and the Effect. To say, *Lazarus come forth*, will not raise a man who has been dead four days,  
and

and is turning to corruption. That is such a Sleep, out of which men cannot be awakened with a call. There may be natural Causes, for ought any man knows, sufficient to stop the course of the Sun; But it is demonstrable, that the Voice of a Man can be none of those Causes: *Sun, stand thou still in Gibeah*, is a very weak and incompetent means to produce such a mighty Effect. This is a way of working peculiar to God alone, to say, *Let there be light, and there was light*. So that these are true Miracles, they cannot possibly be put upon the score of Natural Causes. Now our Saviour wrought a great many of these in his life time, as St. Peter puts them in mind, verse 22. *That he was a man approved of God by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of them*. But then his own Resurrection was clearly the finger of God. For when a man dies, whatever strange power or skill he may be imagined to have, they then leave him, and it is impossible that he should contribute any thing towards his rising and coming to life again. And this St. Peter insists upon in the 32d verse. *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses*. This they were ready to justify, and did afterwards, with their Blood.

2. His other Arguments are plain Inferences and Deductions from several Passages of David, which he undeniably proves cannot

be meant of *David* himself, though he spake them in his *own person*, but that they were clear Predictions of *Christ's Resurrection* and *Ascension* into Heaven : As you may see in the rest of his Discourse. So that these men did not embrace Christianity but upon good grounds ; they were driven out of their unbelief by force of Argument, and brought to the acknowledgment of the *Messiah* by clear and evident Proofs : And then they readily closed with *St. Peter's* offer, to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, *they gladly received his word*, and laid hold on it. Our Saviour himself propounded his Doctrine to the World upon these terms, he did not desire to be believed but upon sufficient Evidence, *John 10 37. If I doe not the works of my Father, believe me not.* He would not have men believe till they are convinced, and see cause for it ; nor would have us captivate our understandings to any thing, but the reason of the thing. If we are Christians, we ought to know why we are so, or else we are Christians merely by chance. We do not make our Religion our own, but by a wise and considerate choice of it. *Prove all things, saith the Apostle, and hold fast that which is good.* We cannot have any *fast hold* even of that which is good, till we have tried and examined it, and find it worthy to be retained, and such as we cannot part with : For what we lightly take up, we are apt as lightly to lay



lay down. And therefore our Saviour, who would have us Christians not onely for a day, or a week, or a month, but for our whole lives, would have us believe upon so good grounds, that we shall have no temptation to alter our belief: As he would have us count the cost, and engage in his service upon good advice, lest that be applied to us which is said of the rash Builder, *This man began, but was not able to finish.* St. Peter exhorts us to be ready to render a reason of the hope that is in us; and that supposes our ability to give a satisfactory account of our Religion: He supposes both that there is Reason for our Religion, and that every one should have studied the Point, and have considered the Reason that is in it.

And this tells us what we are to think of those men, that stifle all enquiry into Religion; who would have us believe upon their bare word; who assume a greater authority than ever our Saviour did; who are not contented, unless men will captivate their Understandings to their Dictates, and *believe as the Church believes.* Thus has the Roman Church domineered over the Faith of men for several Ages. This was not the way, wherein Christianity was first propagated in the World. Men were then argued, reasoned, persuaded and convinced into it. This was our Saviour's and the Apostle's method; They treated men like men, they used the proper Arms of

of Truth, solid Proofs and substantial Arguments: they overpowered men with Conviction, and overcame the World with Demonstration. As their Doctrine was true and good, and such as would recommend it self to every Man's Conscience: so their way of delivering it was fair and ingenuous, and such a way as became heavenly Truth to be conveyed into the minds and hearts of men. And this very thing would tempt a man to believe that the *Romanists* have made some considerable Alteration in the Doctrine of our Saviour, because they take such a quite different course to propagate it. And as a man would presume beforehand, so he shall find it to be certainly true whenever he comes to examine their Doctrine; for they have in many points transformed the wise and holy and harmless Religion of our Blessed Saviour into the quite contrary. So that now indeed they must of necessity put out mens Eyes, and deny them the use of their Reason, before they can think of bringing men over to that Religion.

II. I come now to the *second* thing, which is an Account of their Religious Assemblies, and the way of Worship used in this First and most Primitive Church of Christ. *And they continued stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* Of these in their order.

I. They



1. They continued stedfastly in the *Apostle's doctrine*; that is, they were constant to the *Apostle's teaching or instruction*, for that is the true sense and meaning of the words. They were assiduous and attentive Hearers of what the Apostles taught. This is the first and most necessary duty of Religion. For how can men understand what they are to do, unless they are instructed in it? Men may indeed wilfully and wickedly neglect their known duty; but if they do not know it, they cannot perform it if they would. And therefore this has been always lookt upon as the first thing in Religion. They that worshipped False Gods, had nevertheless an Order of Men to instruct the People how to worship them aright, to tell them how those Gods were to be served; what rites and observances were proper to appease, and to gain their favour; and on the other hand to warn them of those things which would offend and incense these imaginary Deities. And as the light of Nature prompted this course to natural Men, so God himself took care to have Men instructed in those Revelations of his Will which he has been pleased to make to the World. When he gave the Law by *Moses*, at the same time he appointed Priests whose lips should preserve knowledge, that the People might enquire of the Law at their mouth. And accordingly it was practised by the *Jews* down to our Saviour's time, and

and after; *Moses was preached every Sabbath day, being read in the Synagogues.* Nor was our Blessed Saviour wanting to make the like provision for the Christian Church, for they are some of the last words which he spoke to his Apostles, when he bid them *reach all Nations to observe all things whatsoever he commanded them;* Matth. 28. the two last verses. This he left at his departure hence as a *Legacy* to his Church; And this upon the first gathering of a Church we meet with in the first place, *the Apostle's doctrine.*

Now as the Apostles were carefull on their part to fulfill their Master's pleasure and command, so the first Christians were as ready and forward to receive Instruction; which is expressed by a very full word, *they continued stedfastly* in the Apostle's Doctrine, which implies both the assiduity and constancy of the action, and that they were not wearied nor tired with it, but were still fresh to this and all the other Duties. And indeed, what is worthy to gain and command mens attention, if they will not hearken to the *words of Eternal Life*, nor be instructed in the art of making themselves happy? What can be more welcome to men, or to what can they more willingly give ear, than to such Discourses as instruct them in the things which belong to their everlasting happiness, and *shew them the way of salvation?* For the Gospel is what our Saviour out of the Prophet called it, *the preaching*

ching of deliverance to the Captives, and the opening of the Prison doors to them that are bound. And therefore what reasonable man, who had any concern for himself, and his own good, would not readily embrace these glad tidings of Salvation, and be very desirous to be put into a way, that he might inherit Eternal Life? These good Christians were of that mind, and pursued this saving knowledge with an unwearied diligence, and with an uncloyed appetite. They could never hear too much of what their Blessed Saviour had done for them, and what he expected of them. As their knowledge increased, so did their desire of knowing more; for as the Text tells us, *they continued stedfastly* in this duty.

But how distant is the practise of most Christians now a-days from this Primitive Pattern! For though we have the *same* Instructions of the Apostles treasured up in their Writings, and conveyed down to us, yet how *coldly* are they entertained by us! How negligent are men in coming to hear them; or if they do, how listless and unconcerned are they in hearing them; and how regardless of retaining and keeping them in memory after they have heard them! My brethren, Let us shake off this supine negligence, which renders us so unlike these Ancient Christians, and let us be in *earnest* as they were. For have not we souls to save as well as they had,  
and

and ought not ours to be altogether as dear and precious to us? And therefore let us, though we have not the Apostles, those *Living Oracles*, present with us, yet be as careful to hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest their *Written Instructions*; because by them they still *speak* to us, and *declare* to us the whole Counsel of God: And let us shew ourselves to be Christians, by being like those who have gone before us in that holy Religion.

2. They continued stedfastly in *fellowship*, *κοινωνία*, which signifies not so much common society as communication, and a free distribution to the necessities of others. And in this they continued with the same steadiness and perseverance as they did in hearing the Doctrine of the Apostles. They did not onely perform duties which cost them nothing, but they made charity and the highest liberality one of their divine Offices. They did not appear before the Lord empty, but they offered to him that Christian Sacrifice, with which he is well pleased. And not onely this first Church of *Jerusalem*, whose liberality was so great, that no man counted any of his Possessions his own, but they had all things in common; And so much for the honour of Christianity, that some men not unreasonably think it is recorded in the Creed, and that that Article, *the communion*, or communication, of the Saints, refers to this matter: I say besides this Church, it is plain that  
others

others likewise had the same practice, and made their Collections for the Poor at their Religious Assemblies; at which time St. Paul wishes them to make the Collections which he had recommended to them, as being the proper season for those good acts. And this liberality and mutual supplying of one another's wants, did plainly shew, that they esteemed themselves as Fellow-members of the same Body; and that they were perfectly united in their hearts and affections, and tied together in the bonds of love and charity, which our Saviour often mentions as the surest sign and mark of his Disciples.

3. Another Religious Office, in which they were as constant, was *breaking of bread*, that is, receiving the Sacrament. *The bread that we break*, says St. Paul, *is it not the communion of the Body of Christ?* So great was the Devotion of these first Christians, that none of their Religious Assemblies passed, in which they did not make this solemn commemoration of our Saviour, and *shew forth his death*. They constantly kept up the memory of their dying Lord, by this image of his broken, and wounded, and crucified Body; and they would have lookt upon their other Religious Services as lame and defective without this. They had so lively a sense of our Saviour's great Love in dying for them, that they delighted to have the pledges and tokens of it often in their hands: And *that* still renewed

newed the sense of his infinite love, and so disposed them to receive the Communion the more readily again. *Our Saviour's Blood was still warm*, (as St. Jerome says, speaking of these early times,) and these first Christians endeavoured to keep it so, by their devout and frequent remembrances of it. And indeed it was their constancy in this holy performance which quickened and put life into all their other Religious Actions. That astonishing Instance of our Saviour's Love, which they beheld in the Sacrament, inflamed their hearts with love and charity towards their poor Brethren; and made them desirous to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; And by it they were likewise mightily encouraged in their prayers and addresses to God, for if he had given them his Son, how should he not together with him give them all things, as the Apostle argues. What more prevailing mediation could they use to obtain the pardon of their Sins, and the love and favour of God, and grace to help in time of need, than the bloody Death of our Saviour, which had purchased all these things for them? And this frequent remembrance of our Saviour's Death was not onely a help to them in their other Religious Exercises, which no question was a reason of their often receiving the Sacrament, but likewise very instrumental to a good life. For if men did but carry about with them the thoughts of our Saviour's Death, how horrid would



would Sin appear to them which killed the Lord of life and glory? And how dangerous, which exposed that most innocent Person, the Lamb of God, to such bloody Sufferings? For as our Saviour said, *If these things be done in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* If he suffered so deep for the sins of others, what will become of us, if God should punish our own sins upon our own heads? And as our Saviour's Death contains in it the greatest arguments against Sin, so it likewise lays upon us the greatest obligations to obedience, to love and serve our Lord even to the death; who emptied all his Veins, and shed his last Blood for our sakes. This puts us in mind to be true to him, who has done and suffered so much for us. And therefore the ancient Christians in times of Persecution used to keep the Sacrament by them, that it might be always in a readiness to strengthen their Fidelity to Christ, and to bind them the faster to the Profession of his holy Religion. And they not onely lookt upon it as that which would arm them with resolution and constancy in their Christianity, but likewise as an obligation to a holy and innocent life. This is the Account that Pliny gives to the Emperour Trajan of the Christians in his time, that he had informed himself as well as he could of what the Christians did in their Assemblies, and the sum of it was this. *That being met together upon an appointed day, which seems to be the Lord's day,*

day, *they sung a Hymn of praise to Christ as to a God, and bound themselves by a Sacrament that they would commit no manner of wickedness.* Which appears to be their receiving of the Sacrament. From whence we may gather what sense the Christians in those days had of it, that it was a great instrument of holiness, and a religious tye upon them to lead a good life.

And therefore what reason can men now give why they neglect so holy and so usefull an Institution? Have not we as much need to arm our selves against temptations to sin, as they had? Or are we so perfect that we are above those means of grace, and those helps to a good life which they constantly used? No surely, Mens Consciences tell them otherwise. But the truth is, Men neither are, nor are willing to be, so holy as those Men were. For if they would but examine their Hearts why they are so loath to come to the Sacrament, I doubt not but the main reason which lies at the bottom is this; Because it would engage them to a greater strictness of life than they are willing to undergo. If they receive the Sacrament, *they must leave their Sins*, which they are loath to part with; they shall be obliged to *forgive their Enemies*, whom they had rather be revenged of; in a word, they shall *enter into new engagements*, whereas they had rather be free, and at their liberty. Now if Men  
would



would rightly understand things, these are the greatest Motives in the World to persuade them to be frequent at the Communion ; That it may engage us to leave our Sins, that so iniquity may not be our ruine : That it may restrain us from evil, and prompt us to obedience : That it may be a tye upon us not to undoe our selves, and may further us in our way to everlasting Happiness : That by the repeated exercises of loving and praising God in this holy Ordinance, we may be prepared to spend a happy Eternity in those blessed Employments. So that those things which make Men *loath* to come to the Communion, are indeed if they be duly considered the greatest Arguments to *draw* them thither : And it is a hard thing that men should be hindered and kept back from a duty, by the very *advantages* and encouragements of it.

4. The last thing, in a word, which they also continued stedfast and constant in, was their *Prayers* and Religious Addresses to God both for themselves, and for others ; as also in Praises and Thanksgivings, wherein they poured out their hearts before God, and made known their Requests to him, and blessed him for his mercies. They were *instant* at the Throne of Grace, as being sure to be supplied from Heaven with those good things, which they could not *give themselves*. They were much in this profitable and delightful

lightfull converse with God, and in paying this *Worship* to him which exercises all pious graces *at once*, and gives God the honour of *all* his Attributes, of his goodness, and wisdom, and power, of his dominion and providence over us.

Thus I have given you in short a Pattern of the Primitive Piety, that by beholding your first Ancestours in Christianity, you may be incited to follow them, and blush to see your selves come so far behind them. That you may see what a *Believer* was, and what that name signified in those days; that so you may endeavour to fill up that glorious title, by such holy and devout lives as they led: that you may imitate them in the constancy and unweariedness of their devout Exercises, *continuing stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, and in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

The first Christian Church must needs be a safe Pattern for us to imitate. The first and most perfect in any kind is the measure and standard of all others in that kind. And surely nothing could be wanting to that Church, in which the Apostles were present, and into which they poured forth all their Doctrine. And therefore every other Church is more or less pure and perfect, as it is more or less conformable to this First Church of *Jerusalem, which is the Mother of us all.* Now if we should try the *Roman Church*, which pretends

pretends to be the onely Catholick and Apostolick Church, by the marks and characters of *this* which we know to be Apostolick, we cannot but see that it has very much degenerated and departed from it.

They have plainly corrupted the *Apostle's Doctrine*, and have changed the Christian Religion into quite *another* thing than what it is in the *Scripture*.

They will have no manner of *fellowship* with other Christians, unless they will submit to *their* Errours and Corruptions. They are fallen very much beneath the Ancient Christian Charity, I need not say how much.

They have mangled, and maimed, and transformed the Sacrament. Instead of *breaking of Bread*, they abolish the Bread, and sacrifice our Saviour: Instead of delivering the People the Cup, they drink it up themselves: And instead of giving them that Sacramental *Bread* which our Saviour left them, they give them a *Stone*; I mean the hard Doctrine of Transubstantiation.

As for their *Prayers*, they are such as the Apostles and first Believers never used, directed to Angels, and to dead Men: And such as the generality of the People *cannot* join with them therein, for they are likewise in a dead Language, which has not been spoken almost this thousand years; and all over Christendom, at this time, not one in a hundred understands it.

And

And are not these fit men to brag of *Antiquity*, who have so visibly departed from the *First Church* that was planted in the World? Have they not reason to insult over us, and ask us, *Where was our Church before Luther or Cranmer?* when we are able to answer them, it is *here* in this Scripture, where theirs is not to be found. If we hold the first Faith which was once for all delivered to the Saints, and perform the same Offices, and practice the same things, we are of the *same Church*. For if we agree in these things which make up a Church, neither distance of *Time* nor of *Place* can divide us, or hinder us from being of the same Church. This is the true Catholick Church which we always desire to be of, to hold what was from the beginning, and to conform our selves to that First Assembly of Christians, which Ancient Churches themselves must acknowledge to be *more Ancient*. Onely let us be sure to lead *Primitive Lives*, and add an holy Practice to a sound Faith: Or else we shall *certainly perish* though it be in an *Apostolick Church*; it will save us no more than it did *Judas* to be one of our Saviour's *own Family*.

**T H E E N D**